DC

20
FEB 95

WAID
PRIEST
VELLUTO
ALBRECHT

JUSTICE LEAGUE® TASK FORCE™

Velluto & Albrecht

GYPSY...
IN THE COMPANY OF WOLVES

SAVAGE LEGACY FINALE:

DOOM COUNT

"GYPSY--YOU IN YET?"

NOT YET, TRIUMPH--HE'S *FIGHTING* ME--TRYING TO *LOSE* ME IN THE *CITY*.

BUT, I'VE GOT A *LOCK* ON HIM--HE WON'T GET *AWAY*.

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF *TIME*.

"THAT'S JUST *IT*, GYPSY--WE HAVEN'T *GOT* ANY TIME.

"*WRAP* IT UP--*NOW!!*"

Y'KNOW, TRIUMPH--I'VE NOTICED YOU'VE GOT QUITE A *BARK* THERE--Y'KNOW, AS IF SOMEONE PUT YOU IN *CHARGE* OF SOMETHING.

"NO, GYPSY. NOT THE *TIME* FOR IT. *FOCUS* ON THE JOB."

SEE--*THAT'S* WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

I'M ON *COMPLETELY* ALIEN TURF--DOING SOMETHING I DIDN'T EVEN THINK I COULD *DO*--

--AND ALL *YOU* CAN DO IS--

HE'S *FIGHTING* ME--CONJURING UP SOME OF DESPERO'S *MEMORIES* TO SCARE ME OFF.

--HANG ON A SEC.

NICE TRY, ROBOT MAN--

"WHAT IS IT, GYPSY?"

--BUT I'M COMIN' THROUGH!

THWAM!

"GYPSY--"

SHUT UP, JUST SHUT UP. I'M TRYING TO CONCENTRATE.

IT'S *REAL DARK* IN HERE-- WAIT--

--BACK *UP* AND LET ME DO MY THING!

OF *COURSE* IT WAS STUPID. IT WAS *YOUR* IDEA.

BUT, WE'RE *COMMITTED* NOW AND, UNLESS YOU'VE GOT A BETTER CANDIDATE--

--GOT IT.

ANOTHER SECOND OR TWO--

"MAYBE THIS WAS A STUPID IDEA."

WHAAAAM!

"HURRY, GYPSY."

Oh-- YUCK--

"WHAT NOW?"

I'M *ALMOST IN*-- THINK I'M SLOGGING THROUGH DESPERO'S *BRAIN* MATTER--

--IT'S GROSS-- AND IT'S REALLY FREAKING ME OUT--

DESPERO *KILLED* MY *PARENTS*--NOW I'M INSIDE HIS *BRAIN*--

"YEAH, BUT *DESPERO'S MIND* IS *GONE.*"

STILL-- HIS *INSTINCT* --HIS *RAGE*-- CLINGING TO ME--

--NOT GONNA MAKE IT, TRIUMPH.

"C'MON-- HOLD IT TOGETHER --"

"*BULL.* KEEP GOING."

I--I *CAN'T*--

"*KEEP GOING.*"

--WAIT--

--I'M *IN.*

"IS HE OKAY-- IS HE *AWAKE* --?"

I DON'T KNOW--HIS... I GUESS THIS IS A *POD* OF SOME KIND... IS A WRECK--

--I THINK HE'S TRYING TO REPAIR IT.

"THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED. HIS *SYSTEM* PROBABLY *CRASHED* AND HE'S BEEN REPAIRING HIMSELF.

"CAN YOU MAKE CONTACT?"

HI, GYPSY. NICE TO SEE YOU.

"GYPSY?

"GYPSY!"

...uh...

...ARE... ARE YOU--

--L-RON--?

YES, GYPSY-- IN A *VIRTUAL REALITY* WAY.

THIS IS MY CONSCIOUSNESS EMBEDDED DEEP WITHIN THE *VACANT MIND* OF *DESPERO*, YOUR FORMER ENEMY.

WHEN WE WERE *ATTACKED,** DESPERO SUFFERED A *MASSIVE ANEURYSM.* I'VE BEEN EFFECTING REPAIRS, BUT IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE I AM FULLY ON-LINE.

WOULD YOU LIKE SOME *TEA?*

NO... L-RON... THERE'S NO TIME FOR THAT...

*LAST ISH, AND, YES WE'LL RECAP SOON. BE PATIENT--XOO.

THIS IS *VIRTUAL REALITY,* GYPSY. IT WILL TAKE ONLY A *THOUGHT* --

WE'VE GOT TO GO, L-RON-- YOU'VE GOT TO *WAKE UP.*

WE *DESPERATELY* NEED YOU.

BUT--YOU *FEAR* ME.

I FEAR *HIM.* I FEAR *DESPERO.*

YOU ARE NOT HIM, I SEE THAT, NOW.

"*CAN* THE PSYCHO-BABBLE AND *DO IT,* GYPSY."

L-RON-- IF I CAN'T WAKE YOU UP--

--WE *ALL DIE.*

PLEASE--

--TRUST ME.

GYPSY-- LOOK OUT--

HE HAS SOME KIND OF GRENADE--

3:02:31

YIIKES!!

GOT HIM!!

KA-RA-HAM

MY APOLOGIES. I BELIEVE DESPERO COMPLETED MY LAST COMMAND ONCE WE RESET.

GYPSY --?

MAYBE IT'S YOUR APPROACH.

HOLD STILL, BIG GUY. THIS STEEL WIRE WILL HELP YOU LOCATE THE JUNCTION BOX DOWN IN THE TUBE.

--RAY FIGURES THAT RELAY TO BE WORTH ABOUT 10,000 VOLTS. TRUST ME--

--YOU'LL KNOW THE RELAY WHEN YOU FIND IT.

BUT-- HOW WILL MERE WIRE --?

IT'S A CONDUCTOR, L-RON--

BUT HURRY-- =UGHNN!= NOT MUCH TIME--

IN THAT CASE-- ALLOW ME--!!

SKRREEEEEUNNNNCCH!

2:3 1:50

NOW... WHOSE IDEA WAS THIS--?

YOURS, RAY.

I WAS AFRAID OF THAT.

I BELIEVE WE HAVE A LOGISTICAL PROBLEM.

THAT'S IT, THEN.

I GO.

GYPSY-- YOU'LL NEVER FIND THE *RELAY* WITHOUT THE WIRE--

--AND IF YOU *DID* FIND IT, THE *POWER SURGE* WOULD *KILL YOU.*

IN ADDITION, *I* AM MOST QUALIFIED TO *DISARM* THE RELAY.

GYPSY--TRUST *ME.*

WHEN I'M INSIDE YOUR MIND--

--DO I SEE YOU AS YOU *REALLY* ARE OR IS IT SOMETHING *I'VE* MADE UP--LIKE THOSE CLOTHES, AND THE *FLYING*--

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

2:01:19

I AM L-RON, GYPSY. YOU ARE ALL MY FRIENDS.

I DO NOT INTEND TO LET YOU DIE.

--uh-oh--

--LOOKS LIKE DES-- L-RON'S FIRST CASUALTY IS THE LIGHTS.

--WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?

SHEDDING A LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT.

RAY--

--WITH VANDAL SAVAGE'S CHARGED PARTICLE FIELD ON OVERLOAD, I'M POWERLESS AND YOU CAN'T RECHARGE.

HE'S PROBABLY SNAPPED A LINE-- KNOCKED OUT ONE OF THE GRIDS--

THAT YOUR OTHER POWER-- STATING THE OBVIOUS--?

YOU'VE GOT TO CONSERVE ENERGY, IF L-RON CAN'T SHUT THE FIELD DOWN BEFORE THE BATTERIES EXPLODE--

--YOU'LL HAVE TO PROTECT THE CIVILIANS.

ROUND THEM UP-- GET THEM TO THE UPPER DECK.

YES, Mr. HAIG.

GYPSY-- YOU STAY WITH L-RON--

1:39:47

--AND PRAY.

I WAS... IN HIS MIND.

Oh, GOD... IT WAS... HORRIBLE...

...AND THAT IMAGE OF HIM...

...IT'S...JUST OBSCENE...

--IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO KNOW WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED SINCE MY SHUTDOWN.

I ASSUME YOU EXTENDED YOUR OWN ILLUSORY POWER, USING AS A MEDIUM DESPERO'S THIRD EYE WHICH HAS TELEPATHIC AB:L ITIES--

GYPSY--

JUST FIND THE RELAY, L-RON--IT'S NOT NECESSARY FOR YOU TO KNOW NOW WHAT--

PERHAPS L-RON DOES NOT NEED TO KNOW, GYPSY--

--BUT I DO.

WHA--? THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER! HOW--HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?

--TO ENTER MY MIND. CONSIDERING YOUR HATRED OF DESPERO'S FORM--

--FOR YOU TO INITIATE SUCH INTIMATE CONTACT, I ASSUME MUCH HAS TRANSPIRED.

I AM A TELEPATH, GYPSY. I'VE OFTEN VISITED THIS PLACE.

I'VE JUST RETURNED TO THIS QUADRANT, AND I NEED A STATUS REPORT FROM WHAT I KNOW SO FAR--

1:12:55

--YOU HAVE A SLIGHT PROBLEM.

YOU COULD SAY THAT.

ONE OF SAVAGE'S PEOPLE SABOTAGED THE CRYSTAL PALACE. THE POWER PLANT'S OVERLOADED AND SET TO BLOW.

THE PALACE IS COMPLETELY LOCKED, AND SAVAGE'S CHARGED PARTICLE FIELD MAKES THE CRYSTAL ULTRA-DENSE--I DOUBT EVEN YOU CAN BREAK THROUGH IT.

LUCKILY, WE FIGURED OUT WHO AND WHERE THE SABOTEUR WAS, ONLY, THE MINUTE WE GOT OUR HANDS ON HIM--

--VANDAL SAVAGE KILLED HIM.

HOW DID YOU--?

IT'S HOW THE MAN THINKS, GYPSY. GO ON.

SO, NOW WE'RE DOING IT THE HARD WAY. L-RON'S GOING DOWN THIS TUBE, HOPING TO--

WHERE ARE RAY AND TRIUMPH?

TRIUMPH'S POWERS ARE--

--CANCELED OUT BY SAVAGE'S FIELD. YES, I PRESUMED THAT. WHERE IS HE?

RAY'S ROUNDING UP SAVAGE'S PEOPLE. AS FOR TRIUMPH--

"--I THINK HE'S GONE TO SEE THE MAN."

REPENTING, SAVAGE--?

EVIL IS AS EVIL DOES, TRIUMPH.

VERY TRUE, VANDAL GUMP.

AND FOR WHAT WOULD I REPENT?

FOR WHAT WOULD YOU REPENT?

05:1:30

I'M NO SAINT, SAVAGE. NEVER CLAIMED TO BE.

BUT YOU *ARE* A *CANDIDATE*, AREN'T YOU?

YOUR *MOTHER* IS *DEAD*, AND YOUR *FATHER* IS IN *PRISON*. YOU YOURSELF *VANISHED* FOR NEARLY A DECADE--

--ONLY TO REAPPEAR NOT ONE DAY OLDER THAN WHEN YOU VANISHED.

MAYBE I'M DICK CLARK.

YOU ARE *WILL MACINTYRE* AND YOU *THIRST* FOR KNOWLEDGE.

ONLY--YOU'VE YET TO LEARN *KNOWLEDGE* WITHOUT *WISDOM* IS *DANGEROUS*. EVEN NOW, WHILE ANGER *BOILS* WITHIN YOUR CHEST--

--AS YOUR SELF-PRODUCED *RIGHTEOUSNESS* SURGES AGAINST MY APPARENT *EVIL*--

--YOU ARE *FASCINATED* BY ME. YOU WISH TO *STUDY* ME, TO *PLUMB* MY AGELESS *SECRETS*.

YOU HATE YOURSELF FOR BEING SO MORALLY AMBIGUOUS IN THE FACE OF YOUR OWN BLIND *AMBITION*.

FORTUNATELY, I HAVE NO SUCH CONFLICTS.

I SIMPLY *AM*.

0:4 1:19

--SO, TRIUMPH IS CONVINCED VANDAL SAVAGE WAS LYING ABOUT THE THREAT TO HIS DESCENDANTS --?

YES, HE FIGURES SAVAGE DIDN'T NEED OUR HELP AGAINST SOME ENEMY OF HIS WHO STOLE A COMPUTER DISK LISTING SAVAGE'S MILLIONS OF DESCENDANTS--*

*SEE TASK FORCE #17 FOR DETAILS--RDO

--PEOPLE SAVAGE WOULD USE TO REPLACE HIS OWN ORGANS IF THEY WORE OUT OR WERE DAMAGED. HIS CASE TO US WAS SOME ENEMY WANTED TO END SAVAGE'S 50,000-YEAR LIFE--

--PERHAPS BY MURDERING POSSIBLE ORGAN DONORS-- THOSE WITH THE SO-CALLED X-FACTOR IN THEIR TISSUE CELLS. NO, TRIUMPH FIGURES SAVAGE MANUFACTURED THE THREAT--

--BUT I DOUBT BLOWING UP HIS OWN HEADQUARTERS AND HAVING HIMSELF SHOT AT WOULD NET SAVAGE MUCH--

--J'ONN-- WHERE ARE YOU GOING--?

I AM LEAVING.

WHAT?!

GYPSY, THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE OUTCOMES: THE TEAM SURVIVES, THE TEAM DOES NOT SURVIVE.

IN ANY CASE, I AM OF NO USE TO YOU.

IT IS, THEREFORE, MY RESPONSIBILITY TO GO WHERE I AM NEEDED.

--B-BUT, J'ONN--

YOU ARE IN CAPABLE HANDS WITH L-RON, GYPSY. I WISH YOU ALL WELL.

0:35:51

0:34:47

--AGAIN--

--DON'T-- DON'T LEAVE ME--

J'ONN...?

--J'ONN--

GYPSY--I BELIEVE I MAY HAVE FOUND--

0:3?:22

--WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR--

0:30:2

YEEOWW!!

VVVAAARRROOOMM

IS THAT --IS THAT IT--?

HAS THE CHAIN REACTION STARTED --?

NUTS.

NOT MUCH JUICE LEFT--TOO MANY PEOPLE DOWN BELOW!

NO TIME TO WAIT FOR 'EM TO CLIMB UP HERE-- GOT TO GRAB AS MANY AS I CAN WHILE STILL HOLDING ONTO ENOUGH POWER FOR A LAST-DITCH SOLID LIGHT SHIELD.

I CAN'T SAVE EVERYBODY. AND WHAT REALLY SUCKS IS--

0:29:5

0:29:5

"--I CAN'T SAVE THE TASK FORCE."

WHAT WAS THAT--?

FASCINATING. EVEN NOW, MERE SECONDS BEFORE THE END--

--YOU'RE STILL STUDYING ME. LOOKING FOR THE CHINKS IN THE ARMOR.

YOU'VE GAMBLED THE LIVES OF YOUR TASK FORCE THAT YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT ME.

FOOLISH CHILD.

I HAVE NO ESCAPE ROUTE, TRIUMPH.

I HAVE YOU.

YOU CAME HERE, TO MY QUARTERS, HOPING TO DISCOVER MY ESCAPE ROUTE. HOPING AGAINST HOPE THIS IS ALL SOMEHOW MY DOING AND THAT I WOULDN'T REALLY ENDANGER A HUNDRED INNOCENT LIVES.

AND, SHOULD THIS BE THE LAST DAY OF MY AGES-LONG EXISTENCE--

THUD

0:22:17

"--SO BE IT."

L-RON--!!

L-RON --WAKE UP!!

0:20:51

L-RON-- WAKE UP NOW OR WE'RE ALL DEAD!

L-RON!!

0:19:41

0:18:48

0:18:00

0:17:00

0:16:00

THANK YOU, GYPSY.

I BELIEVE I AM BACK ON-LINE NOW.

THIS SHOULD ONLY TAKE A MOMENT--

0:14:31

--THEN AGAIN--

KEEEE

0:13:15

0:12:55

--THERE MAY BE A SLIGHT DELAY--

0:09:40

0:08:53

I'VE LOST MY LASER TOOL.

WITHOUT ITS GAUGES--

0:05:41

--THE BEST I CAN MANAGE--

"DO IT, L-RON--!"

--IS A GUESS.

0:03:50

--JUST--

0:02:39

0:01:21

--DO IT--

"--DO IT."

0:00:10

'NIGHT, KID.

'NIGHT, MOM.

MOM--!

HAVE TO CLOSE THE DOOR, KID. MOM'S GOTTA MAKE SOME *NOISE* OUT HERE, AND I DON'T WANT TO KEEP YOU UP.

DON'T WORRY-- I LEFT THE *NIGHT LIGHT* ON.

YOU'RE GOOD, YOU KNOW. VERY GOOD.

KA-KLAK

NOW THAT YOU'VE SECURED THE DOOR, THE *SECURITY FAILSAFES* YOU'VE INSTALLED AROUND THE CHILD'S ROOM WILL EFFECTIVELY REPEL MOST ANY INVADER.

YOU NEARLY KILLED *EVERYONE* INSIDE MY CRYSTAL PALACE--OVER ONE HUNDRED INNOCENT LIVES NEARLY SACRIFICED TO YOUR EFFORT TO STOP *ME*.

TELL ME-- HOW DOES THAT MAKE *YOU* ANY BETTER THAN *I*?

KRASH

K-CHAK

I NEVER SAID I WAS BETTER THAN YOU.

AH, BUT YOU *ARE* POSSESSED OF AN *EXTRA-ORDINARY* MEASURE OF THE *X-FACTOR* WHICH PROVIDES MY IMMORTALITY--

--AND A FEW *OTHER* STRENGTHS AS WELL.

KRASH

AND THAT IS WHY YOU USED YOUR *WEALTH* TO BUY THE *TECHNOLOGY* AND THE *PERSONNEL* TO MOUNT THIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST ME--

--YOU BELIEVE I WOULD SOMEDAY COME FOR *YOUR* SON.

YOU'RE *RIGHT.*

MY RESEARCH INDICATES THE ODDS OF YOUR BEING A *PRIME ORGAN MATCH* ARE EXCELLENT.

AND, ODDS ARE, *YOUR SON* WOULD BE EVEN *BETTER.*

YOU-- ANIMAL!!

KERR-

RASH

I AM CRO-MAGNON.

HOMO SAPIENS ARE *MUTANTS*-- ABERRATIONS.

YOUR KIND IS TO BE CONQUERED --DOMINATED.

--YOU SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE CHALLENGED ME.

I MIGHT NOT HAVE NEED OF YOUR CHILD FOR *DECADES*-- PERHAPS NOT *EVER*.

YOU'VE *KILLED* YOURSELF--

KERR-

RASH!

--AND I WILL NOT MOURN FOR YOU.

SAVAGE!

WE'RE-- WE'RE TOO LATE!

--AND IT TOOK US AN HOUR TO TRACE HIM--

--AN HOUR TOO LONG--

YOU'RE GOING DOWN, MISTER-- MURDER ONE.

IT TOOK US TOO LONG TO GET THE PEOPLE TO SAFETY! BY THAT TIME SAVAGE'S GOONS SNEAKED HIM AWAY--

NO, BUT I CAN TEAR YOUR ARMS FROM THEIR SOCKETS.

MURDER? WHAT MURDER?

YOU HAVE PROOF OF SUCH A MURDER? YOU HAVE POLICE POWERS TO ARREST ME FOR SUCH A MURDER?

YOU COULD BUT YOU WILL NOT.

I HAVE NOTHING TO HIDE. HAVE THE AUTHORITIES CONTACT ME--

SAVAGE INC.

--I WILL GLADLY CONSENT TO AN INTERVIEW REGARDING THIS *TERRIBLE TRAGEDY.*

HOWEVER, BEREFT OF YOUR *UN SANCTION,* YOU HAVEN'T THE *AUTHORITY* TO *DETAIN* ME--

--AND IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU ARE *NOT* VIGILANTES.

WHAT--? THAT'S IT?! HE JUST WALKS?!

I SAY LET'S TWIST HIS SNOOTY LITTLE *HEAD* OFF!!

NO, RAY-- SAVAGE IS *RIGHT.*

BESIDES--

"--I DOUBT THAT'LL BE NECESSARY."

LET RAY GO.

RAY, GO AFTER SAVAGE. I DOUBT YOU'LL FIND HIM, BUT HIS AGENTS WILL BE OBSERVING.

WHEN YOU DO NOT FIND HIM, YOU SHOULD APPEAR *SUITABLY ANNOYED.* PERHAPS *BLAST* SOMETHING OF NOMINAL VALUE.

IF *NO ONE* PURSUES HIM, SAVAGE WILL SUSPECT--

--THAT HE HAS BEEN *DECEIVED.*

--WHA--?

EXCELLENT.

I--I--

--YOU LEFT US.

I PURSUED THE ONLY COURSE OF ACTION LEFT ME, GYPSY--

--THE ODDS OF YOUR SURVIVAL WERE *NOT* AFFECTED BY MY PRESENCE ON-SITE. IN THE *LIKELY EVENT* OF YOUR *SAVING* SAVAGE--

--MY *NEXT HIGHEST PRIORITY* WAS HIS *INTENDED VICTIM*--

--IS IT *SAFE*--?

NO.

IT WILL ONLY BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SAVAGE REALIZES WE HAVE DECEIVED HIM. HE WILL SEEK TO VENT HIS ANGER ON MY *TASK FORCE*--

--AND ON *YOU*.

TAKE YOUR SON AND GO.

SO *YOU* FINANCED THAT OPERATION-- HIRED THAT *MANIAC* WHO ALMOST *KILLED* ALL THOSE PEOPLE AT THE PALACE.

YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN *SAVAGE*.

I NEVER SAID I WAS--

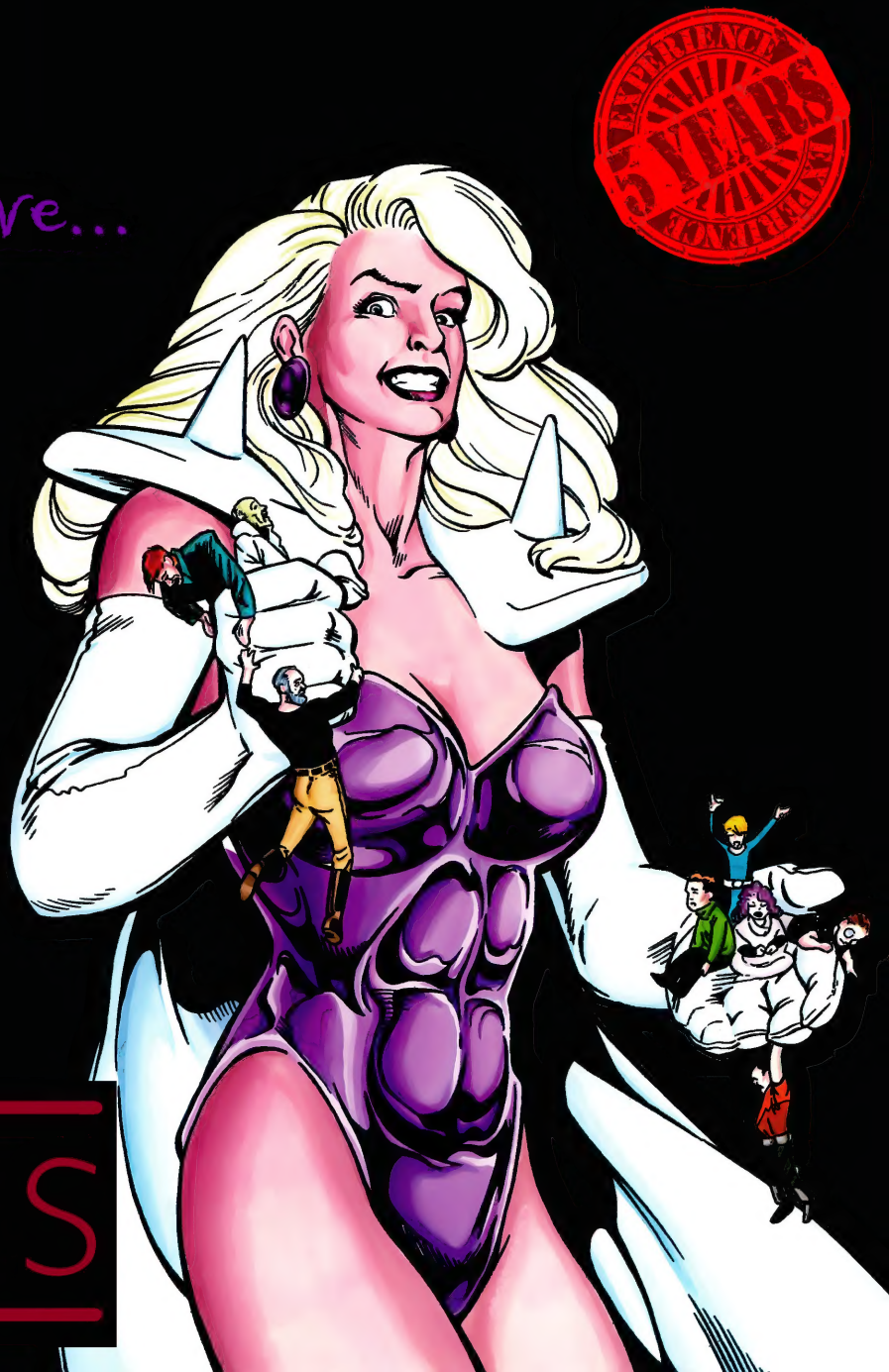
AFTER ALL--

--HE'S MY *FATHER*.

PRIEST & WAID WRITERS ▼ VELLUTO PENCILLER ▼ ALBRECHT INKER ▼ GRAFE COLORIST ▼ CUNNINGHAM LETTERER ▼ DIAZ EDITOR

NEXT: *CHOKULA*
ONE FINE DAY IN MONTCLAIR...

From Baaldur, with love...



GLORITH

novus